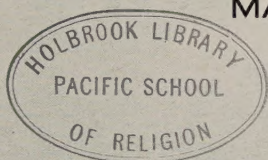


# SOCIAL ACTION

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MARCH 15, 1948



*For  
Rural America*

A NATIONAL FARM POLICY

By Lloyd H. Fisher

A MINISTRY TO  
THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY

By Ralph L. Woodward

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# SOCIAL ACTION

## Magazine

VOL. XIV, NUMBER 3

MARCH 15, 1948

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### CONTENTS

TWO APPROACHES . . . . .	<i>Shirley E. Greene</i>	3
A NATIONAL FARM POLICY . . . . .	<i>Lloyd H. Fisher</i>	4
A MINISTRY TO THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY		
	<i>Ralph L. Woodward</i>	23
GOOD READING . . . . .		34
ON TO ACTION . . . . .	<i>Ray Gibbons</i>	35

Cover picture by Charles Phelps Cushing

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SOCIAL ACTION, published monthly, except July and August, by the Council for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches, 289 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y. Frederick M. Meek, Chairman; Ray Gibbons, Director. Subscription \$1.50 per year; Canada \$1.60 per year. One to 9 copies, 15c. each; 10 to 49 copies, 12c. each; 50 or more copies, 10c. each. Re-entered as second-class matter January 30, 1939, at the Post Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1948, by the Council for Social Action.



## Two Approaches

The two articles which compose this issue of *Social Action* illustrate two distinct angles of approach to Christian social action: the "vertical" and the "horizontal."

The problem with which Mr. Fisher deals brilliantly is a "vertical" problem. It runs up and down through rural society, vitally affecting the last farmer on the land at one end and perplexing the agricultural committees of Congress at the other. It presents the citizen with the central dilemma of democracy. It is his personal problem; yet by himself he can do nothing effective to solve it. To deal with such problems: the national farm organizations have grown up, as well as the major political party alignments of farmers.

Mr. Woodward, on the other hand, has given us a splendid analysis of the horizontal approach to rural social action. He describes the task of the Christian community leader who musters a variety of resources for the meeting of a complexity of needs, to the end that a good local community may emerge.

Both approaches are legitimate; both are essential for effective Christian social action. The principal goal of the vertical approach is *justice*; that of the horizontal approach is *community*.

Characteristic methods of the vertical approach are educational forums, resolutions, letters to your Congressman, letters to your newspaper and agitation in your farm organization. Characteristic methods of the horizontal approach are study clubs, community councils, direct action campaigns, pressures exerted through local civic, social and farm organizations.

The Agricultural Relations Department of the Council for Social Action endorses and practices both approaches. Our Rural Churchmen's Seminars in Washington illustrate the first; small discussion and action groups in local churches illustrate the second.

—SHIRLEY E. GREENE

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Shirley E. Greene is Agricultural Relations Secretary of the Council for Social Action.

# *For Rural America*

## A NATIONAL FARM POLICY

By Lloyd H. Fisher

There is an inescapable incongruity in writing about future agricultural policy at present. The future of agriculture is always dark, no matter what its present condition. This may be taken as an axiom to which all those who write on agricultural policy subscribe. Therefore a program for agriculture is always a program of reconstruction, reorganization or reform, designed to improve the earnings and secure the livelihood of the American farmer. But the present moment is a difficult one in which to make these problems seem real to the vast majority of Americans, who have their principal or even sole experience with the condition of the farm economy through the medium of the prices they pay at the grocery stores and butcher shops.

### *Uneasy Prosperity*

These prices are high, the highest in history. As poor a reflection as they are of the prices farmers receive, they do bear some relationship. The American farmer by and large is doing very well and the prospects for him are excellent for at least a few years to come. The Marshall Plan will provide an important supplement to the already swollen demand for ag-

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ricultural products. This of course does not mean that all farmers are prosperous. There are hundreds of thousands of farmers whose resources are so limited that no conceivable price relationship would bring an adequate livelihood. But, by and large, those who produce our food, feed and fibre are doing well. In the last few years they have had an adequate, even a generous return for their efforts.

Why, then, do we continue to treat agriculture as a problem? Why do we, a nation not overly hospitable to planning, persistently plan for agriculture? Why do agricultural economists, a generally conservative breed, implicitly reject supply and demand as sufficient regulators of the wealth and prosperity of the farm population? Why does the Farm Bureau Federation, in most of its manifestations a firm believer in private enterprise, invite protection and a managed economy for agriculture?

### *Prosperity Needs Planning*

Put very simply the answer is that no one has any confidence that farm prosperity will continue unaided. There are several important reasons for this apprehension. First, the market for agricultural products in the absence of governmental regulation is highly competitive. It is in fact the only major market in which the conditions of pure competition are approached. Whereas manufacturing enterprises are characterized by varying degrees of monopoly and, in the absence of monopoly proper, by administered prices, price leadership, trade-marks, patents and all of the paraphernalia with which modern merchandisers protect their markets, agricultural commodities are sold by grade in common markets in which one farmer's commodity is totally indistinguishable from another's and is purchased by discriminating wholesale buyers.

A second and even more important reason is that agricultural prices are peculiarly sensitive to even small shifts in



demand. The relative stability of prices which the manufacturer can maintain through the measure of control that he can exercise over his market is denied to the farmer unless the government provides it for him. The whole structure of the farm economy is such that the tens of thousands of producers whose harvests make up the supply of any agricultural commodity are bound to be engaged in ruthless albeit impersonal competition with one another. The principal object of government price support programs has been to limit the consequences of this competition.

With falling prices the manufacturer either restricts production or shuts down his plant. Thus in the industrial sector of the economy, a decline in demand, with its consequent lowering of price, brings about almost automatically a reduction in supply and a movement toward a new equilibrium. But the characteristic reaction of the farmer faced with declining revenues is to increase his output and attempt to retrieve his losses by marketing an even larger supply. The farmer cannot shut down his plant. His farm is primarily a way of providing employment for himself and his family. The investment in the farm is the purchase price of his job, the agricultural machinery the tools of his craft. The very house he lives in is forfeit if his employment is lost. So while the rest of the nation's producers meet falling demand by retrenchment, the farmer produces more, and the more he produces the poorer he gets.

The farmer, then, is peculiarly dependent upon a high level of demand for his products, the demand for his products is peculiarly dependent upon a high national income, and a high national income is peculiarly dependent upon full employment. At bottom the pessimism over the future of farm income is a pessimism over the prospects for continued full employment. If it is given that we are to plan for agriculture—and I think it is, whether there is a Republican or Democratic administration in 1948—we ought to be fully aware that the "farm

problem" can become a national opportunity. To realize this opportunity fully we need above all to avoid the errors of a narrow and special-interest approach, and cast our planning in terms of national welfare rather than agricultural relief.

### *Four Foundations*

A sound agricultural program must be a structure which stands upon four supporting foundations. All four are necessary if the edifice is to be strong. First and foremost, American agriculture must supply an adequate flow of food and fibre for the population of the nation, and for some years for a substantial number of the impoverished citizens of other



*Acme*

The farmer is denied any control over his market and any shift in demand may bring the price down. Above: New York Cotton Exchange, February 11, 1948. Cotton, which had dropped, rallied as trading continued.



lands. Agricultural production must be permanently established at a level high enough to maintain our entire population at standards to which they have not yet been accustomed. There must be no return to the shallow philosophy underlying the agricultural programs of the early thirties, with its organized restriction on output while much of the nation was badly fed.

Second, those who are to produce the food and fibre of the nation must have adequate incentives and reasonable rewards. In general terms this means the assurance to farm people of a fair and equitable share of the national income. It means also a consistent and sustained national effort to improve the rural environment through the provision of public services and greatly improved cultural facilities.

The third essential objective of agricultural policy is the maintenance of our national resource in land, water and timber. We must reverse the history of two hundred years. In place of exploitation we must substitute husbandry. Much of the damage which has been done is irremediable. If exploitation does not quickly give way to conservation it will be catastrophic.

### ***Stratified Farm Population***

The fourth requirement of agricultural policy is an equitable distribution of the benefits of agricultural planning among all groups and classes of the farm population. It was once true that democracy flourished best in the countryside and on the farm. Many of the most cherished symbols of democracy are rural in origin. But increasingly these are in danger of becoming symbols of the past. The hired man is no longer the prototype of the agricultural worker. He still exists but the rural scene is more and more dominated by the migratory worker and the casual harvest hand. The family farm is still dominant in many sections of the country and perhaps in the nation as a whole, but encroachments upon the pattern are growing.



Rural society becomes increasingly stratified, not only as between farm operator and farm worker, but as between large farmer and small.

I imagine that there will be no widespread objection to these four objectives of an agricultural policy: an abundant supply of food and fibre, a fair share of the national income for the farm population, conservation of natural resources, and an equitable distribution of benefits to all sectors of the agricultural population. So long as the objectives remain unimplemented they are irreproachable. As a people we always vote for virtue and take a firm stand against vice. And so long as objectives are broadly enough framed, all groups in the population appear to be united upon them. No piece of legislation was ever passed for other than the public interest. All sorts of Congressional measures are masked behind professions of concern for the public welfare. Thus price control was sabotaged in order to bring prices down. Thus the Taft-Hartley Act was passed over a presidential veto under the pretense of a superabundant concern for the American worker. Thus the attack upon family farming currently being led by Senator Downey of California is represented as solely in the interest of the family farmer. So strong are the public symbols of our democracy that we seldom come to grips with our differences at the level of principles or objectives.

### *Most Important Requirement*

We must move, therefore, to more concrete programs for the realization of the broad objectives of agricultural policy if we are to see where we stand. I would suggest that the most important single requirement of a sound agricultural economy is the stabilization of the demand for agricultural products. The farmer is inherently unable to adjust to fluctuating demand, and it is out of this inability to adjust that there arises the peculiar vulnerability of the farmer to depression.

What needs to be done to stabilize the demand for agricul-

tural products? In one sense there is no genuinely satisfactory answer short of the stabilization of the entire economy at high levels of employment. But however much we may prefer this solution to any other, we dare not count upon it. The outlook for full employment grows less sanguine as each new month is added to the indexes of retail and wholesale prices. Prudence and even the most rudimentary sense of political and economic realities require that we proceed on independent assumptions.

There are a number of quite specific measures which could contribute to the maintenance of a high level of demand for agricultural products.

1) One of these is a national food allotment program which would guarantee an adequate supply of nutritious food to low income groups. While the final form of such a program remains to be worked out, its outlines are reasonably clear. Essentially what is involved is the revival of the food stamp plan, but with important changes. The food stamp plan of the late thirties, by which families on relief were given stamps redeemable for surplus foods, was limited in two important respects. In the first place, it was confined to commodities of which surplus supplies existed. In the second place, its benefits were restricted to persons on relief. The result was a program of minor consequence to the farmers and to people on relief, and of no consequence to the much larger group of persons whose incomes, while desperately low, were not low enough to qualify for aid.

### *Department of Agriculture Plan*

A vastly improved program has long been under discussion within the Department of Agriculture, and its details have been worked out reasonably well. Under this program the "means test" for eligibility would be eliminated and the agricultural commodities offered would not be limited and variable from month to month as commodities moved from long to short supply and back again. Any family would be eligible to



participate in the plan for a fixed percentage of its income. The appropriate percentage would vary from time to time as it became necessary to increase or reduce the demand for agricultural commodities, as the income needs of the non-agricultural population varied, and as the price level varied. One widely discussed figure was 25 per cent. Thus, any family could, for a sum equal to 25 per cent of its income, purchase an adequate diet of specified value from the shelves of any local grocery store, with the government standing the cost of the difference between the family contribution and the retail price. There would be no eligibility requirements. Presumably only those families would participate whose expenditures for an equivalent diet would cost an amount greater than 25 per cent of their income. In terms of present prices it is probable that families with incomes up to \$3,000—and perhaps more—would benefit from the program. Well over half of the families of the nation have incomes of less than \$3,000. (The Aiken bill incorporates the main outlines of this food allotment program, but provides for a figure of 40 per cent rather than 25. I believe that this figure is much too high to enable the program to perform much more than a relief function, but the program merits support, and its scope is likely to prove flexible as the need for liberalization develops.)

Although the precise details of such a plan must be left flexible, it is clearly sound in principle, and would represent an important change in the orientation of agricultural policy. In lieu of restriction, abundance would be encouraged. In lieu of specialized subsidies to farmers, with little or no effect upon the national diet, public health would be promoted. In lieu of a means test with all of its humiliation, there would be universal eligibility. Finally, the influence of such a program would be toward a pattern of agricultural production directed to consumer needs, rather than the endless, aimless and wasteful bolstering of surplus production of crops such as cotton, which war alone can consume in the quantities produced.

### ***School Lunch Program***

2) Another program, which could do much toward maintaining a high level of demand for agricultural products, is a national school lunch program totally supported by federal funds. No children, regardless of income level, are expected to pay individually for the fuel that keeps the schoolroom warm, the books they use, or for the teacher who instructs them. Our resources are more than adequate to provide a nutritious lunch for every school child in the nation each day. In addition to its other obvious merits, such a program is a far sounder means of promoting stability of agricultural income than the restriction of badly needed production.

3) Still a third measure would be to participate with other governments of the world in devising ways of using our surplus agricultural products to feed people in undeveloped countries while these countries are carrying out industrial development programs. This would require a series of multilateral negotiations between surplus food producing countries and food importing nations. Under such agreements, surplus output of food could be sold at greatly reduced prices to countries like India, China, and several of the Latin-American countries as a means of supporting the industrial development of the economies of those nations. Before restricting production or even diverting foodstuffs into industrial alcohol or rubber, why should not all reasonable efforts be made to dispose of them as food in those areas of the world where industrial development is essential to full employment throughout the world?

### ***Agricultural Price Policy***

4) It has been the primary objective of the Department of Agriculture to maintain certain levels of agricultural income irrespective of demand. Price policy has been the core of this agricultural policy. The result has been "support prices," commodity loans and direct payments to restrict production. Once



we orient agricultural policy around the stabilization of demand for agricultural products, it becomes imperative to recast the objectives of our pricing policies. For even if each of the three measures proposed above were adopted, there would still be an important role for government measures affecting the price of agricultural commodities.

For some years the government has been more or less managing the price of many agricultural commodities. It has been a haphazard type of management for several reasons. To begin with, the management of prices has been an inherently inefficient means to the end for which it was designed—the maintenance of agricultural income. Secondly, the management has been oblique and indirect, governed by an artificial formula of equity—parity price—which really had only the function of keeping prices higher by some arbitrary amount than they would otherwise have been.

### *Direct Management of Prices*

Much energy and some time might be saved if the government set out deliberately to manage agricultural prices and spent less effort in artfully contriving equitable comparisons which would yield a predetermined result. The important problems are not those which revolve around the content of a parity formula or an index number. It is the objective of the management policy with which we need to be concerned. If measures to increase consumer demand of the type discussed above were adopted, the ends of a stable agricultural economy would be better served and price management would be freed to perform a function for which it is better suited. Price floors will not guarantee agricultural stability except at enormous costs, but prices can be managed so as to induce changes in agricultural production which are badly needed and long overdue. Prices can be set through loans, direct government purchase and resale, stockpiling and a variety of other techniques so as to encourage a shift away from grain,

tobacco and cotton farming and into the greater production of livestock, poultry and dairy products, vegetables and fruit.

There are many reasons why such a shift is desirable. Grain, tobacco and cotton are the perennial problem crops of the American agricultural economy, because their production is far in excess of normal requirements. Secondly, a shift into livestock, dairy, poultry, vegetable and fruit production would increase the supply of foods in which the human diet is most deficient. Finally, the long run interests of conservation would be served by a shift from the soil depleting cash crop economy to the soil building dairy and livestock enterprises.

### ***Too Many People***

5) Finally, we must recognize that the relationship between agricultural resources and the agricultural population is badly out of joint. For many decades there has been a very large surplus of population on farms. Neither the droughts and foreclosures of the thirties nor the great war-born movement to the shipyards and the aircraft factories has sufficed to bring about a proper balance.

We are in the midst of an agricultural revolution. In every phase of the production process great advances are being made. New varieties, improved seed, modern insecticides, small tractors, improved combines and corn pickers, and now the cotton picker, have combined to increase agricultural productivity very rapidly. Moreover, many of these developments have just begun to enter the agricultural economy and their full effects have not begun to be felt.

Probably a million workers could be taken out of agriculture *at present* without significantly lowering production, if they were selected with this in view. The well-meant concern for those who will be displaced by advancing technology is largely misplaced. We have had an unfortunate tendency to sweep a good many of our problems under the rural rug as the indifferent housewife proverbially disposes of an accumulation



of household dust. The countryside is a broad expanse, and it is easier to ignore a thousand rural shacks than a single row of slum tenements. But we do not solve problems by scattering them. These are a million pair of hands that could be more productively used at other places and in other roles. It is no act of kindness to let competitive forces work out their solution, and it would be worse folly to attempt, by governmental act, to protect so insignificant and obsolete a tenure.

### *Transfer of Superfluous Farmers*

Instead—and I believe this is an essential part of any soundly conceived agricultural program—we must set about the task of conveying these people from a sector of the economy in which they are superfluous, burdensome and essentially without prospects, to other employment. I do not for a moment suggest a program for the removal of particular people ac-



*Resettlement Admin. photo by Shahn*

“... easier to ignore a thousand rural shacks than a single row of slum tenements.”

cording to a schedule of government selection. There is, however, the need for a program which will bring together the wasting and wasted manpower on the farm and the employment opportunities of the city so that isolation, ignorance, lack of technical skills, inability to transport oneself and family will no longer represent the true barriers to movement.

To this end much new machinery will be needed. Among the requirements for the task are:

- 1) Programs of vocational training for rural youths.
- 2) Special short-term courses for adult farmers in the younger age groups to equip them to use tools and simple shop equipment. Such programs should be particularly concentrated in areas where sharecroppers and small tenants predominate and in areas of submarginal land.
- 3) A federal employment service, adequately staffed to make job placements.
- 4) Payment of the costs of transportation to the place of new employment if necessary.
- 5) A combined credit and land purchase program. One of the most serious obstacles to movement will be the equity or the investment a farmer has in his small enterprise. The government should be equipped to purchase the farms and farm equipment of farmers who are prepared to move from agriculture to industry, and either retire these lands from crop production or consolidate them into existing farms or new farms of appropriate size with the aid of a specially designed credit program.

### ***Reorganization of Farms***

An orderly population transfer such as is here proposed bears not only on the waste of manpower which our rural economy conceals, but upon an equally essential reorganization of the farm enterprises which remain. With full devotion to the principle of the family farm, it is still true that the family farm requires contemporary definition. The tech-



nological advances of recent years can be incorporated fully within the agricultural economy of the nation only if farming enterprises are reorganized to accommodate them. And reorganization for a large proportion of American farms means an increase in size.

This is an issue about which we need to be very clear. Modern developments in farm machinery are by and large adapted to family enterprises, and their adaptability to family enterprises is probably the source of salvation for the family farm. But the family farm will compete successfully with the corporate farm only if family farms are large enough to employ modern farm machinery economically. It ought to be a major object of Federal agricultural policy to bring about over time the reorganization of family farm enterprises, securely estab-



*Charles Phelps Cushing*

**Modern developments in farm machinery are adapted to family enterprises. Above: Modern tractor pulling a plow.**

lished on a scale adequate to the employment of modern techniques, and yet not so large as to depend primarily upon hired labor.

This warrants no relaxation of efforts in defense of the family farm as the keystone of American agriculture. The principle is threatened in many areas. Large farming interests seek its overthrow on reclamation projects in California, Texas and Colorado. These attempts will be resisted by those who hold the objective of a democratic society to be superior to any narrow economic end. But drudgery and inefficiency are not essential conditions of democracy and much remains to be done to bring many American farms to the level at which they may share in the new techniques which agriculture now affords.

We have dealt till now with but two of the four requirements which at the outset we imposed upon an agricultural program. There remain to be dealt with in the space remaining two others not less important, although they must be treated more briefly.

### ***Conservation of Resources***

The record of American profligacy in the use of natural resources is too well known to require discussion here. Slashed, burnt and cut-over forests stretch from one end of the country to the other. Wretched, spindly second-growth timber speaks eloquently of our indifference to what will come after us. The war just past has added its due measure to the destruction of agricultural resources. Land which bred the dust storms is once more producing wheat, ready to be given back to the elements at the first change in the weather or the price of grain. So depleted are the forest resources of the country that there has been a veritable invasion of Canadian forests by American newspapers and magazines to secure the supply of pulp from which their newsprint and paper must come.

As difficult as are the problems of economic stability for agriculture, in many ways the problems of conservation are

even more difficult. There are no ingenious solutions available or possible. Neither timber nor soil fertility are annual crops. Solutions are measured in decades and not years, decades of patient, careful, painstaking, unspectacular work. The general outlines of the remedy are clear. We must replace our destroyed forests with new forests, some on public lands, some on private forest land, much of it on the woodlots of present farms. To preserve the national soil fertility we must introduce, virtually farm by farm, a new rotation here, a cover crop there; build a drainage ditch or a check dam; retire a piece of submarginal land, dam up another river for flood control and reclamation.

This, to the limit of the resources that Congress has provided, is what has been done, but at a slow rate. At best we are holding our own, and we need to gain ground. The substance of the conservation program is sound. It is the pace which needs to be altered.

### *Disadvantaged Farm Groups*

There remains, as a final requirement for an adequate agricultural program, a series of measures designed to secure an equitable distribution of the benefits of planning within the agricultural population itself. Even if farm reorganization were pursued with vigor and success, and even if a million of those employed in agriculture were moved to more productive employment outside of agriculture, there would remain farmers with inadequate resources, tenants with uncertain tenure and hired farm laborers.

The needs of small farmers and tenants would best be served by a substantial extension of the rural rehabilitation and tenant purchase programs of the Farmers Home Administration, freed of the restrictions which a hostile Congress has imposed, and far more adequately financed than now.

The hired farm worker and more particularly the migratory worker is the outcast of modern economic society. He is a legis-



lative orphan, excluded from the benefits of nearly every piece of social legislation. With the virtual demise of the Farm Security Administration, the migratory worker has all but disappeared from the programs of the Department of Agriculture. Outside the provisions of the National Labor Relations Act, and difficult to organize by virtue of the character of his employment, he has gained little from trade unionism. Perhaps the brightest prospect for the migratory worker is the prospect that he will one day be largely replaced by machines. But although the numbers of migratory workers may be much reduced in years to come, substantial numbers will continue to be required, and for these and for those others who have not yet been replaced, there are ameliorative measures which urgently need to be taken.

The most immediately helpful measure would be an extension of unemployment insurance coverage and minimum wage legislation to hired agricultural workers.

Of equal importance is the provision of adequate rural housing owned either by the workers themselves or by the

### NATIONAL CITIZENS COUNCIL FOR MIGRANT LABOR

In October, 1947, a group of individuals and organizations interested in the problems of migrant workers in the United States met in Washington and set up the National Citizens Council for Migrant Labor. The organization grew, in large part, out of the conviction of its founders that unless some central agency goes to work on the problems of the migrant worker and his family, they will be forgotten and neglected in the rush of work which always faces both public and private agencies.

The National Citizens Council for Migrant Labor recognizes that there must be developed a comprehensive, long-term farm labor program which will include the migrant worker. The formulation of such a program should lessen the need for migrant labor by greater diversification both in individual industries and by an area basis, and by greater use of local labor. Employers and public and private agencies and organizations must all help in making this long-term program possible.

Rev. Thomas B. Keehn is Chairman of the National Council, and its address is 1751 N Street, N.W., Washington 6, D.C.

Federal government. Unfortunately there has been, within the last year, a serious backward step in this respect. Housing built and operated by the Farm Security Administration for migratory workers is now on the auction block, and apparently most of it will find its way into the hands of organizations of growers specially created to purchase the camps and shelters from the government.

### *Planning Migratory Labor*

The labor market for seasonal agricultural workers is the most disorganized and chaotic which our economy provides. Not only is it highly seasonal and therefore casual, but it is plagued by a chronic oversupply of workers. In times of depression agricultural labor is the residual legatee of unemployment in the cities. Even in times of prosperity the permanent pools of underemployed commonly exceed their employment opportunities. The farmer has little or no incentive to extend the periods of employment he offers. In fact, the uncertainties of weather and markets encourage the employment of larger numbers of workers for shorter periods of time. The seasonal worker has at best the unhappy choice of a more or less fixed residence and virtual unemployment, or a nomadic life in exchange for longer periods of employment.

The migratory worker is unable to organize the labor market and the farmer is unwilling. The responsibility rests clearly with the government. It is easy to overrate the effectiveness which the government can have. The patterns of farming and the rhythm of plant growth are stubborn facts. But even though no cure may be provided, much improvement is possible.

Among the measures which would be helpful is a strengthening of the United States Employment Service in rural areas. Serious consideration should be given to compulsory registration of seasonal employment offers with the Employment Service. The other side of the coin would be a grant of authority and an appropriation of funds to the Employment Service

which would enable it to organize, on a regional basis, mobile groups of farm workers provided with transportation, housing and a schedule of employment. The orderly movement of these farm workers from area to area would contribute significantly to the decasualization of employment and the orderly harvesting of crops.

### *Removal of Other Deficiencies*

Finally, there need to be mentioned those measures designed to remove certain of the disabilities from which the farm population as a whole suffers. The farm population suffers from poor schools, inadequate medical facilities, and exclusion from the benefits of the old age and survivors insurance program. Many farms still lack electric power. Remedies for these deficiencies are known; federal aid to rural schools, health insurance, the extension of social security legislation to farmers, their families and those they employ, and an expanded program of rural electrification all belong in any moderately comprehensive agricultural program.

The sketch I have tried to draw seems terribly crowded and yet it is incomplete. It is neither a program which we can hope to institute by the day after tomorrow nor is it one we can afford to accept as an adequate ultimate objective. It is a program for the middle distance. Incomplete though it may be, it contains the promise of a healthier, sounder and more democratic society both on the farm and off.

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# *For Rural America*

## A MINISTRY TO THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY

By **Ralph L. Woodward**

The town and country minister, in addition to the normal pastoral functions as preacher, educator, counsellor, pastor, church administrator, and leader of the church, also has a role as a leader in the community. In the small town and country community this responsibility cannot be avoided by the minister. It is simply thrust upon him by the nature of his work and the setting in which he carries on his ministry. The acceptance of this role and the use of it vary widely depending upon the minister's understanding of the community and his interpretation of the Christian religion as a transforming power in community life.

### *Minister to the Community*

In the early days of America, the minister held a relationship to the whole community, with very little distinction between his duties to his congregation and those of a pastoral relationship to all people living in the area. Any program of action and work for the benefit of the people living in the area might originate under the leadership of the church and its ministry, even though later taken over by the government or other agencies. The Christian ministry concerned itself with

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any or all issues involving the total welfare of the population. The official separation of church and state served to define the relationship of the state to the church but did not limit the ministry or the church in their concern for the welfare of all people living in a parish area. Even to this day some of the New England churches in calling a new minister remind him that he is to be pastor of all the people living in the town and is not to limit his leadership and work to those who are united with the church. However, other developments brought a breakdown in this community relationship of the minister for most areas of the United States and weakened that type of relationship even in the colonial areas.

The first development resulting in a breakdown of the community role formerly carried by the minister was a new form of settlement and the rapid expansion of that settlement across the continent. The settlement of families on land areas and not in communities or villages brought about a situation where many people simply did not belong to any community, to any parish area in the village community sense, and they frequently had no ministry of any kind for long periods of time. Settlement of families on land areas, once started, moved westward rapidly and the churches of the colonial areas were unable to provide ministers as rapidly as the frontier moved across the continent. Even if clergy had been available in adequate numbers and their care provided, there would have been but little ministry to the community, for it did not exist.

### *Rise of Denominationalism*

The second element in the loss of a strong minister-community relationship is found in the rise of denominations. The loss of a community setting through settlement on farms rather than in villages, the large county units of government, and the competitive aspects of the new and growing denominations practically forced the churches and ministers away from any sense of a community parish to the main task of evangeliza-

tion of individuals; the gaining of adherents for a particular denomination, and the building of churches. With no easily defined community, no basic parish area, but competing churches, the average family soon came to expect the minister to deal mainly with the problems of individuals and families and to place little or no emphasis upon the welfare of the area.

A third factor in this same trend was the introduction of large numbers of untrained or partially trained ministers into the areas of new settlement. These men heroically established open country and village churches, brought people into their membership, frequently served a number of these churches by itinerating among them and generally had a short tenure with any congregation. They served the purpose of keeping the people in a new country from losing all relationship to the Christian church and brought emphasis upon a ministry to those belonging to the church, but gave very little attention to a ministry for all the people of a specific area.

As a result of such rapid changes, the majority of clergymen came to interpret their responsibility as belonging simply to the membership of a church, with very little emphasis upon ministerial responsibility for the entire community. The idea of a ministry to the whole area was lost for many sections of the country. In some regions of the country this older concept of a parish ministry has not been discovered again.

### *Recovery of Parish Concept*

In time a community life developed in the areas of new settlement and it included the village center and the homes of the surrounding countryside. The full development of that sense of community is still in process, and it will not bring a closely bound community in the manner of the older settlements. Meanwhile, the merging and closing of many open country and village churches have reduced some of the competition. In the remaining churches an attitude of cooperation and sharing in accomplishment of Christian work continues to



grow. With an increasing number of trained ministers serving such communities the interest, desire, and need of ministering to the entire area have grown.

We are again approaching the time when, except for certain of the small sects, practically all churches and their clergy will conceive of a ministry to the whole community and its needs as a part of their task. The right of the town and country church and its ministry to be concerned with the needs, welfare, and future of all the people of a parish area is seldom challenged. As cooperative church work develops the ministry increasingly assumes again the role of community leadership. Religion will cease to be a divisive force in community life when its ministry can conceive of its task in relation to all the people of the whole community.

### *Rural vs. Urban Opportunities*

The town and country church and its ministry hold a relationship to the entire community that is utterly impossible for the urban church and ministry to have in relation to the city. There are a number of distinctive differences in the relationships. A brief statement of some of these differences will serve to focus attention on the role of the minister in his community.

First, let us look at some differences in the relationship of the church to the surrounding area.

1. The church in town and country areas tends to be related to the whole community setting, and this is the same locale to which all of the other community agencies and organizations are related. Because of the size of the city, the urban church can never be as closely related to the whole or to the other organizations and agencies.
2. The town and country church may have deep roots in its particular social setting; the city church, even though it be a neighborhood institution, is not rooted in the whole social context so profoundly.
3. The town and country church tends to be closer to the



*Charles Phelps Cushing*

occupational interests of the people than is generally true of the urban church.

4. The small town and country church generally serves people who know one another personally and have a fairly close identity of social and economic experiences. In contrast, the large city church serves people who generally have only a casual acquaintance with each other and who represent a wide variety of social and economic experiences.

5. Generally the church of town and country is located in a setting with comparatively few environmental changes and a fairly low degree of population change except for the movement of youth from the locality. The urban church is confronted with a great many environmental changes and generally a high degree of population mobility.

As can be readily seen, the town and country church is located in a setting that thrusts awareness of the whole community, its institutions and total life, before the minister. His

church has a responsibility to the people of a fairly well-defined area and does not as a general rule work with people who do not have residence in that setting. His church must attempt to help secure a unified community.

### ***Minister and People***

Second, what are some of the basic differences in the relationship of the minister and the people in town and country as compared with the city?

1. The town and country minister has a personal acquaintance with most of the people of the community and can hardly avoid having such acquaintance. The city minister must struggle to secure such acquaintance.

2. The town and country minister gives a great deal of attention to helping people get along with one another, because the relationship of the people to each other is more personal. The urban minister gives less attention to this type of work because his people have fewer primary relationships.

3. The town and country minister's preaching and service tend to deal with life issues arising out of a homogeneous environment and may be regarded as highly personalized. The minister of the city faces diverse environments and many problems come as abstract or theoretical issues.

4. The town and country minister's home life, personal character habits, manners, and personal attitudes are more visible to the entire community than is the case for the city minister. The town and country minister's influence and ability will be accepted or rejected more readily because his personal life is never separated from his public ministry.

5. The town and country minister can relate himself to the whole community and he has more potential influence on the community as a whole than is ever possible for the urban minister.\*

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\*This statement of rural and urban differences in churches and ministers is condensed from notes of staff discussion by the *Interseminary Commission For Training For the Rural Ministry*.



There is no need to raise the question as to whether the town and country minister should assume a relationship to the entire community. He cannot escape such responsibility and remain a leader of the church. He has no choice but to assume some role of community leadership in addition to his responsibilities as pastor of a church. What, then, is his proper role?

### *Professional Leadership*

The town and country minister must recognize that he is regarded by the people of the community as a *professional* leader. The school teachers, county agricultural agent, extension workers, superintendent of schools, social workers, and other organizational representatives employed in the community are also regarded as professional leaders. In general, such leaders are not related to the local group in the same sense as the businessman and the members of other professions. Instead they are employed by groups in the community because of ability to lead in particular phases of community life. Their tasks as professional leaders are different from those of business or political leaders who generally secure change through power, authority, or domination of some kind.

The minister's task is also different from that of the volunteer and group leadership of the community. The professional leader has the task of recruiting, educating, inspiring, and stimulating the volunteer and group leadership. The town and country minister is frequently asked to assume positions of group leadership. If he accepts such a community role, he may find that he is taking an unwarranted amount of time from the work of his parish and at the same time preventing the development of adequate voluntary leadership. The role of the minister as a community leader will be fulfilled best when his time and strength are given to the discovery, enlisting, and training of people to become leaders of groups.

The town and country minister becomes effective in community leadership, as in parish work, only when he stays in a

locality long enough to win the confidence and loyalty of the people. Successful changes in the practices, attitudes, and customs of individuals and groups are brought about over a period of time involving education, a new vision, and practical procedures.

### ***Engineering Social Change***

The minister attempting to lead a program of change must be able to create a dissatisfaction with the present situation and to stimulate the desire for something better. Any program of action will fail if these two steps are not achieved. However, dissatisfaction and the desire for something better must come without the minister becoming marked as too radical or too conservative. Most ministers have this problem at some time in their ministry. Dwight Sanderson's *Leadership For Rural Life* (New York, 1940, pp. 106-107) calls attention to this problem of the leader:

The leader who is really to lead, in the sense that he obtains followers who share his objectives, must not be regarded by them as too radical or too different from themselves, yet he must have a certain prestige and must command their respect and confidence. Some so-called leaders assume they must at all events assert their convictions, even though they be martyrs to the cause about which they are unable to change the opinions of those whom they would lead. Their personal sacrifices are commendable, but are they effective? Others deal with the situation more realistically and recognize that any permanent advance can be achieved only through a genuine change of attitude upon the part of their constituents through a gradual process of education. . . .

If the employed leader . . . quietly educates local leaders so that they advance his ideas as their own and assume active leadership on their behalf, the employed leader may maintain his role as educator and stimulator of group thought without centering antagonism on his personal leadership. This is not to imply that the employed leader should take a neutral course simply to maintain his own security, or that there are not circumstances in which he must take a stand and be prepared to take the consequences, but that in most instances the cause

that he advocates will be more effectively and permanently advanced if it is espoused by local leaders who are the choice of their groups or who create their own following.

### *Knowing the Community*

The role of community leadership requires that one secure a thorough understanding of the resources, agencies, and opportunities of the community. A knowledge of the people, their background, government, and present condition of life, is essential to intelligent leadership. *Your Community, Its Provision for Health, Education, Safety and Welfare*, by Joanna C. Colcord (revised by Donald S. Howard and published by the Russell Sage Foundation, New York), while not primarily for town and country communities, is an excellent guide for the type of information a minister needs in giving leadership to the community. *Rural Community Organization*, by Dwight Sanderson and Robert A. Polson (published by John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York, 1939), contains a splendid outline in Appendix B to assist the leader in preparing an adequate workbook and description of the social organization of a town and country community. Such a workbook started soon after a minister's arrival in a community and brought up to date from time to time would soon result in his having more basic information regarding his community than could be found from any other source. Unless the minister knows the facts he cannot hope to inspire others to work and assume responsibility for securing something better.

### *Areas for Action*

The minister is concerned with the development of that type of society and organized fellowship in town and country life that will bring a clear understanding of God's will and conscious living by it in all of life's relationships. He stands for the growth and change in community life that will enable its people to achieve more nearly such an aim. In the role of a community leader the minister is striving to see that the basic



needs for such a society and fellowship are provided. He will seek to guide leaders to work for improvement in such areas as:

1. The religious and moral conditions, with emphasis upon adequate opportunity for spiritual growth.
2. The educational and cultural resources for both young and old.
3. The civic and political consciousness, with special interest in the adequacy of community services, their future development, and the quality of the elected and appointed leadership of the local government.
4. The economic condition of all the people, including those living in the open country as well as those in the village center. Of particular importance is the provision of adequate employment opportunities, especially for youth that would remain in the area if adequate livelihood were available. The credit facilities, land use and farm tenure policies, marketing provisions, and transportation and communication facilities will also be of concern.
5. The recreational and entertainment resources, especially with regard to their adequacy, supervision, and availability for all ages, classes, and races.
6. The social and fellowship opportunities of the community.
7. The hospital and medical facilities, health education, sanitary controls and preventive health measures.
8. The conservation of the soil and other resources of the community.
9. The cooperation of community organizations, agencies and institutions for the achievement of more adequate services, and a minimum of unnecessary competition and conflict.
10. The functioning of a community council mindful of the needs of the whole community area.
11. Interpretation to the community of wider state, national, and international issues; analysis of their impact on both the

local and the broader situations; discovery of effective ways in which the community can help to solve such issues.

These are important areas in which the minister can function as a community leader. His church, in principle, stands for the improvement of conditions in all such phases of the community. The church with a ministry that recognizes the relationship to the whole community as well as to the membership roll will be a mighty factor in the transformation of American community life.

### *Building Leadership*

While the responsibilities and functions of the minister have become increasingly heavy and varied in the present-day church, no minister or congregation need feel that time and effort given to the securing and training of leaders for effective work in the community will involve too great a burden. Experience would indicate that a vital concern for the whole community brings new leaders into church and community enterprises. No other leader of the community has the opportunity afforded the town and country minister for inspiring, securing, and training leaders who will share in bringing the community more nearly into the type of society and fellowship that can be called Christian.

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# Good Reading

## *On Agricultural Policy:*

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## *On the Rural Church and Community:*

- Coady, M. M. *Masters of Their Own Destiny*. New York: Harper, 1939.
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## On To Action

*"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Where did the Master lead his followers? Not into the wilderness but into the crowded ways of life—the market place, the temple courts, the capital city.*

*He who would take up his cross in the crowded ways of life must quicken "the Holy Imagination" of the Master. He must cultivate compassion for the faithless, the fickle, and the ungrateful multitude which follow leaders like sheep and whose hunger often leads them, like sheep, astray.*

*He who takes up his cross must have good reason for the faith that is in him. He competes with ardent devotees of Karl Marx or Friedrich Nietzsche. He combats frustration, fatigue and fearfulness. Men will speak falsely and revile him but if he knows Whom he serves he can rejoice and be exceeding glad.*

*He who walks in the crowded ways must deal with pressure, expediency and compromise, and yet maintain his fidelity to his Lord. He learns to view decisive moments as steps in a long pilgrimage, important in themselves but relative to the vaster designs of the Ruler of History. Yielding at points, he learns when to exert his full influence that the direction may be changed and the pilgrimage proceed.*

*He who walks with a Cross learns a confidence and joy which come unbidden and unsought. Each crucifixion becomes the threshold of a new resurrection. Even wars, depressions and riots portend the Kingdom. For God gives to the pilgrims in the crowded ways a foretaste of the kingdom and the power and the glory.*

*Ray Gibbons*

## COMING IN SOCIAL ACTION

### *Taft-Hartley Act (April)*

Gerhard Van Arkel, formerly on the legal staff of the National Labor Relations Board, will analyze the Taft-Hartley Act and discuss its implications politically and in terms of labor-management relations.

### *Must Christians Choose Between Communism and Reaction? (May)*

Liston Pope, a keen observer of American social movements and a professor of Christian Ethics who has a firm grasp on Christian criteria, writes about the principles, strategy and programs of both right and left, Scylla and Charybdis. Liberal Christians will find guidance for their most important decisions on how to deal with communism in America without fortifying reaction.

### *Congregational Christian Social Heritage (June)*

This General Council issue will deal with the heritage of New England theocracy and liberalism which have produced a fellowship of free churches distinguished for social concern. It will interest not only those who belong to these churches but all who value a public-minded church in a democratic society.

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